BUSHNAN

pam(H)/BUS

THE DRUIDS.

BY

J. STEVENSON BUSHNAN, M.D.,

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF EDINBURGH,
ETC. ETC. ETC.

READ BEFORE THE WILTSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
AND PUBLISHED IN AID OF THE FUNDS OF THE
SALISBURY AND SOUTH WILTS MUSEUM.

SALISBURY: BROWN & CO.

1865.

Price One Shilling.

WELLCOME
LIBRARY
Pam (H)
BUSHNAN

Wellco y
for th
and Und s
of Med

22501674701

PREFACE.

The following Address to the Wilts Archæological and Natural History Society, was delivered at a Conversazione held in the Palace of the Lord Bishop of Salisbury.

I have two reasons for its publication. In the first place, although people talk freely about Druids and Druidism, they know very little of either. This may be partly due to the fact that archæology is by no means a popular study. There exists a very common supposition that the minds most adapted to antiquarian pursuits are distinguished by a proneness to tiresome minuteness in research, and to disproportionate generality in speculation. Again, the communication of such knowledge is prevented by difficulty in obtaining it. Books on the subject of Druidism are numerous; but the best are too costly for the private collections of men not specially interested in the subject. They are only to be found in some of the provincial libraries of antiquarian and topographical societies; and only there for the use of their members. Hence it is that many intelligent persons,

generally interested in archæology, are unable to follow the researches of the scholar, and avail themselves of their results. To such, I venture to think, this essay may be of value, as a brief statement of some of the more important subjects of antiquarian enquiry.

My second reason for publishing this address is my desire to aid, if only in the smallest degree, the great work of inducing men to observe and think. The Salisbury Museum was established for the same purpose; and any profit which may arise from the publication of my address will be devoted to aid the funds of that Institution.

J. S. B.

Laverstock House, Salisbury,
September, 1865.

THE DRUIDS.

My Lords,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is your intention to visit Stonehenge to-morrow. I have therefore availed myself of this preliminary meeting, to make a few remarks concerning the Druids, with whose forms of worship that great monument is supposed to be connected. What I shall tell you of the Druids, and the comparison I propose to draw between Druidism and cognate and even other systems of religion will, I think, increase your interest in those wondrous and mysterious stones.

The word Druid is generally understood to designate the minister and priest of an ancient superstition—a cruel idolatry which existed among our forefathers long before the commencement of the Christian era. We have been taught to believe him the leader and instructor of a blood-thirsty people, and the willing instrument of torture and of death. He has been regarded as the ready instigator of cruelty, and his special employment, according to some of modern critics, was to burn human beings in wicker cages, as we see depicted in popular Histories of England. The victims so sacrificed were offerings to the infernal gods. The Druid has also been represented as the war chief and medicine man of a

nation of savages. But I shall not introduce him to you with the coloured plumes of the one, nor with the blood-stained, painted face of the other; nor shall I represent him as the slave of a vindictive idolatry, or the mad votary of a furious superstition. When you have examined the evidence I have to offer, your consciousness of the many errors of Druidism will not prevent your doing justice to its ministers or recognizing in their habits and teachings some traces of the solemn truths which God Himself has taught to man.

Many persons have ignorantly misrepresented the character and opinions of the Druids. They have charged them with every conceivable vice, ignoring or denying such events as served to throw a gleam of brightness over the dark picture they themselves had drawn, and denouncing any scholar whose independent reading led him to hope that, after all, the Druids were possibly not so bad as they had been painted.

Another class of critics have recently appeared. They belong to the sect of the Nihilists—men who find it convenient to deny all, and to cease to believe anything. Nor is it strange that in an age so sceptical as our own, so constantly driving us back upon principles, and undermining faith by new demands for proofs, there should be well informed persons who ask for authentication of the very little knowledge we are supposed to possess of the mere existence of the Druids. Such critics would limit, in a niggard spirit, the application of every

fact, and give the barest possible interpretation to the words in which a few Greek and Roman authors have mentioned the British Islands and the then existing Priests. All the numerous indirect sources of knowledge, these men ignore; being more willing to doubt than to allow that which may by possibility lead to undesirable admissions. Knowing this, we shall do well to avoid extremes, neither raising the Druid to a rank of higher intelligence than is given to him by documentary evidence, archæological research, and judicious deductions; nor denying him that which unprejudiced enquiry allows. To save myself from the imputation of partial research, it is almost necessary that something should be said about the history and character of the people among whom the Druids dwelt, and to whom they belonged. For in estimating the probability of the historic character given to them, it is essential that it should be judged in reference to the habits and condition of the people. I must therefore ask you to bear with me a few minutes, while I rapidly follow the scanty references to the national trade, and nascent civilization of Britain at that early epoch, in the works of those Greek historians who wrote before Julius Cæsar composed his Commentaries.

We can trace the existence of the British nation for many centuries, without so much as hearing the name Druid. But, beginning with Herodotus, who wrote about 500 B.C., we observe that each succeeding historian was better acquainted than the one preceding him with the islands of Britain and

their resources. They all mention the visits of the Phœnicians to the aboriginal inhabitants for the special purpose of obtaining tin, lead, and skins, and for the general objects of trade. This is authenticated by many trustworthy writers. Now if these accounts be true, it is highly probable that the wants and habits of civilized life were thus introduced among the inhabitants, many years before the Roman Conquest.

Herodotus says that tin was obtained from the Cassiterides, the tin islands (Scilly); but he knew no one who had visited them. Aristotle who wrote a hundred years after Herodotus, speaks of the British Isles by name, Albion and Ierene (England and Ireland), and marks their situation so accurately as to leave no doubt of their being well known to geographers of his day; but he does not mention their inhabitants. Following time in the path of the Greek historians, we next unroll the testimony of Polybius, who, without adding to our knowledge, reaffirmed what had been said by his predecessors. Next come we to the history that Strabo wrote. It is dated four hundred years after Herodotus composed his chronicle, and we there learn what these tin islands were, and how the trade so long and profitably followed by the Phœnicians became known to the Romans. But above all, he interests us with a picture of some of the inhabitants, who are described as wearing black cloaks and tunics girded about the breast, reaching to the feet. They were bearded like goats, he says, and walked with staves.

We cannot read any of the old authors' brief and passing references to the trade of Phœnicia with the islands of Scilly, and, as we know from other sources, with the west coast of England, without regretting that so little should have been written by the Greek historians. They have said enough, however, to assure us that England is indebted to Phœnicia for the first lesson in trade, and probably for the first step towards civilization. What the influence of the strangers upon the religious opinion and practices of the Britons, or in other words upon their Druidism, may have been, we shall presently enquire.

When Tyre was conquered by Alexander (332 B.C.), the trade of the Phœnicians with the Britons fell into comparative unimportance; but Carthage, its colony, continued, though not without opposition, the profitable intercourse. The Greeks were the competitors of the Carthaginians. The Greeks, however, though excelling all nations in the noblest efforts of intelligence, were inferior to the Carthaginians in maritime enterprize. Their national character was less adapted to open a profitable intercourse upon friendly commercial terms with foreign nations, any of whom they would not hesitate to insult by treating as barbarian. So important, however, did their trade with Britain become, that according to Diodorus Siculus, who wrote in the time of Cæsar and Augustus, the tin, lead, and skins bought of the Britons were carried to Ictis (the Isle of Wight), and from thence transported to Vennes and other parts of Brittany, to be conveyed to Marseilles, a Greek colony, so Justin

informs us, established by the Phocæans 500 years before the Christian era. Such a way of transit surprises us; but it saved the unenterprising Greek navigators from the stormy seas which break upon the Cornish coast; and Diodorus says—and the fact is as curious to the geologist as to the archæologist—that carts passed over on dry land, from the mainland to the island.

Considering the great importance of the trade which the ancient Britons carried on with civilized nations for a period of at least 500 years before Christ, I cannot believe that they were barbarians in the common sense of the word; and still less can I credit Pliny when he describes them as a wandering race, nude, or clothed in skins, and obtaining a precarious subsistence by hunting. To account for or explain the apparent contradiction of the pursuit of trade, involving the arts of mining and tanning, the formation of roads and the construction of carriages, for hundreds of years, and a continued state of barbarism, those who credit Pliny, attribute a very low condition of social life to the inhabitants of the central and northern districts of the island, where intercourse with the trader was less frequent. But we are told that the people used wheel-carriages, and brought war chariots into the battle field. Cæsar himself tells us that Cassivellaunus, after his defeat, disbanded the greater part of his army, and of his chariots retained *only* four thousand.

Cæsar's attack upon Britain and the ultimate conquest of the country is graphically told by the

Roman Emperor. In his Commentaries, the inhabitants, with their social life and religious system, are for the first time introduced to us. I am quite prepared to believe that many grades of social life, many states of humanity, may have existed among the tribes in Britain; but the religious opinions and the rites of worship, the modes of instruction and the administration of justice, were probably everywhere the same. Druidism was universally acknowledged, and the uniformity thus established amongthe great sections of the nation, became to them a bond of mutual interests. Differ as they might in the conditions and modes of life and in the habits, of the tribes, they received instruction from the same teachers, believed in the same doctrines, and engaged in the same religious services.

Hume says that no system of idolatry has obtained such a complete control over men's minds as Druidism; and it is a common opinion that, acting upon the fears of its votaries, it completely subdued the personal independence and self-respect of the people. Such assertions might be fairly disputed. All systems of idolatry are cruel, and ignorance is ever willing to bow down in disgraceful subservience to an intelligent power demanding its obedience. Without the historical evidence necessary to define the influence of Druidism, under the guidance of its priests, we may with certainty assume that, as very little knowledge was given to the people, the power of the priesthood was established upon popular ignorance. The religious dogmas,

received as truths by the initiated, were disguised under signs and symbols; and even the most intelligent and best disposed of the populace were overawed by ceremonies, and the imposing spectacles produced by grouping multitudes under good lights with theatrical accessories. Thus the Druids, as philosophers, priests and teachers, ruled the highest as well as the lowest of their countrymen. I do not say that their influence was, to such a people, an unmitigated evil; for the control of ignorant or only half instructed men, is better entrusted to a dominant intelligence than to the overbearing influence of physical power, acting by uncontrolled self-will. If there must be a master, let it be the master mind. The proverb tells us that in the Kingdom of the Blind the one-eyed man is king. So in the prevailing darkness of the time in which the Druids lived, their own scanty enlightenment rendered them the natural and fitting rulers. The crushing despotism of a proud uninstructed nobility, as ignorant as the common folk, would have had a depressing and slavish influence upon the public mind. The effect of the authoritative control of superior knowledge was on the other hand calculated to elevate thought, enforcing, as it did, its commands by an assumption of delegated Divine power, and offering a future life, with the approbation and blessing of the gods to the most down trodden sons of man. Thus the power of even the Druid enobled humanity in the very despotism of his authority.

Druidism was founded on the assumption of the

existence of an Omnipotent Being, independent and self-controlled. The Deity thus designated was a personal God, to whom obedience and worship were due. The faith of the Britons was therefore far preferable to the Pantheism of some of the Oriental schemes of philosophy—they can scarcely be called theologies—to which Druidism is said to be allied.

Man was regarded in Druidism as a fallen intelligence destined to work his way back to his lost condition, if at all, by suffering. To do this it was necessary that he should pass through several stages of existence, of which the human nature was the first. "Among the most important tenets of the Druids," says Cæsar, "is the immortality of the soul, which, they believe, passes after death into other bodies. They think that this is a great inducement to the practice of virtue, for the mind is relieved from the fear of death." Should a man during his human life select evil in preference to good, his next condition they maintained was destined to be a more debased stage of being than the present, and the lower he fell the less would be the probability of his ultimate advance to his first and noblest state. Thus transmigration became the thought that dictated the system of doctrines influencing every determination and act of the men who received Druidism as a guide for the present and a hope for the future.

The possession, by the Druids, of the doctrine of metempsychosis as a principal article in their creed is a curious fact. Some writers have found a satis-

factory explanation thereof in the conjecture that the Druids were taught by a Pythagoréan Missionary who visited them from the colony at Marseilles. But, as the Greek philosopher himself obtained it from Egyptian priests, and the Druids were at the time living in Britain, and, in the exercise of their functions, teaching this doctrine among others, there is more reason to believe that it was brought by the Druids from the East, whence they came. I say this without doubting the influence of the Phocæan colonists upon the Gauls, who lived near, and had intercourse with them; as possibly also upon the Britons, with whom they appear to have carried on a large and profitable trade. Justin says "It was from the Phœnicians the Gauls learned both the use of a more polite way of life—their barbarity being laid aside and corrected—and the tillage of lands and the enclosure of cities within walls. Thus they became accustomed to live by laws and not by arms, to prune vines, and plant olives; and so bright a face was put on men and things that, instead of Greece being moved into Gaul, Gaul was transplanted into Greece." Over this pleasant view of the influence of the polished Greek upon the rude self-possessed Gaul, I will not throw a shade. But it certainly gives no indication of the rise of that dense cloud which overshadowed the early morning of British history.

The eastern dogma of transmigration had a vital and profound influence upon the individual character, social system, and future anticipations of the Britons. They may have accepted, and probably did accept

some of the mythological poetry of the Greeks and Romans (and to have done so was no reflection upon their literary taste and artistic skill), but they had no necessity for their Gods. Cæsar says, speaking of the Gauls, "Their principal deity is Mercury, in whose honour they have erected numerous statues; they hold him to be the inventor of the arts, and the god who protects men on a journey, and leads them on their way; moreover they ascribe to him the power of granting success and prosperity in affairs of gain and commerce. Next to Mercury come Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva, to whom they ascribe qualities similar to those which are attributed to these deities among other nations: Apollo is considered to heal diseases, Minerva to initiate mankind in the arts and sciences, Jupiter to be the king of heaven, and Mars to be the god of war." But these divinities, esteemed above all others by the poets and philosophers of Greece and Rome, were of Celtic origin; and were known by native names before they were introduced into the Grecian Pantheon.

If time permitted, it would be an interesting task to trace the historical connection of Druidism with the Oriental forms of religion. But we must limit our inquiry to Buddhism, which, as the offspring of Brahminism, still possesses a mighty control over some of the great multitudes of the East. In both, the transmigration of the soul is the mainspring of the religious thought embodied in the system.

In Buddhism manhood is the probationary state,

and all human beings are destined to pass from that life through a series of existences. By a good life, in the Buddhist sense, a man may secure a happy temporary existence in another world, for a term of years so long as to be calculated by millenniums. By an evil life a man is left to a term of suffering not less, perhaps still more prolonged. Buddhism, so much of it at least as is a system of religion, is the offspring of human fear in the anticipation of the future, and its aim is to prevent evil, not to secure the greatest possible good. The desire of the Buddhist is to pass quickly, and with little suffering, to the Nirvana, a state of annihilation of consciousness. He does not expect, like the Brahmins, to be absorbed into the God who gave him being, but to lose individuality and cease to be. That a man should suffer pain and inconvenience that he may hasten the time of his annihilation is inconceivable to a people who, like ourselves and other Europeans, cling to existence, in spite of suffering, and abide evil because we hope to have possession of a future eternal felicity. Looking at this life as nothing more than a state of suffering, Buddhism inculcates perfect resignation to natural evils, and submission to injuries received from man. A sort of intellectual quietism—a profound calm—is to be the habit of life, the condition most to be desired; and this may, the Buddhist believes, be attained by a monastic life, poverty, and dependance on the beneficent feelings of others.

We are scarcely justified in speaking of Buddhism as a religion, for the doctrine of a personal God forms

no part of the philosophical system. It teaches man to anticipate a series of transmutations and varieties of suffering; and tells him that to hasten annihilation, is the greatest good, and the principal business and necessity of life. But still it is the habit of the Buddhist to make daily offerings at a shrine; and his readiness to join in religious festivals and processions, though he has certainly no perception of a personal god, would caution us against a too decided assertion that the Druids acknowledged, in the same sense as we do ourselves, the existence of a Divine personality. The fact, however, that they admitted subordinate deities, seems to point to the existence among them of a belief in the existence of one Great Superior Ruler of all, personally interested in the moral condition of man, and bestowing rewards and punishments upon a system of inflexible justice.

Of the form of Druidic worship, and the religious rites that were performed, we are for the most part ignorant; but we find enough in Cæsar and later authors to indicate that Sacrifice was a constant service, and that it was used as a means of propitiating the anger of God. The Druids are greatly misrepresented and maligned if human sacrifices were not sometimes offered. "All the Gallic nation," Cæsar says, "are much given to superstition; for which reason when they are seriously ill, or are in danger from their wars or other causes, they either offer up men as victims to the gods or make a vow to sacrifice themselves. The ministers in these offerings are the Druids, and they hold that the wrath

of the immortal gods can only be appeased, and man's life be redeemed, by offering up human sacrifice; and it is part of their national institutions to hold fixed solemnities for this purpose. Some of them make immense images of wicker work, which they fill with men, who are thus burnt alive in offerings to their deities. These victims are generally selected from among those who have been convicted of theft, robbery, or other crimes, in whose punishment they think the immortal gods take the greatest pleasure; but if there is a scarcity of such victims, they do not hesitate to sacrifice the innocent also." This account is too precise and enters into too many particulars regarding motives and manners, to permit such doubts as give authority to denial. We must either admit the statement as it stands, or withdraw our confidence from Cæsar as a trustworthy historian. This practice among the Druids is doubtless an evidence of great ignorance and debasement; and yet we find that it existed among other ancient nations frequently spoken of as civilized. The Phœnicians offered, by fire, human sacrifices in the worship of their foul God Moloch. Yet they were bold sailors and keen traders, and are said to have been civilized. If the Britons were at all influenced in their religious opinions and practices by them, the custom of burning prisoners and malefactors may have been thus brought into the country. But as Cæsar speaks of the terrible custom among the Gauls, it is more than probable that the Britons, coming from the same stock, brought it with them whence they came.

In one of the Brahminical myths there is a curious allusion to human sacrifice as if it were a rite recognised and admitted by the people. Harischandra, the son of Vedhas, was childless, and desiring a son sought the assistance of Varuna, offering to sacrifice the gift to the donor. Upon that condition a son was given, but the father avoided the payment he had promised. For days and for years the sacrifice was withheld, till Rohita, the doomed youth, knowing his destiny, interfered for his own safety, and purchased of a very poor man his second son Sunahzepha, for a substitute. When the intended victim was tied to the sacrificial post he was saved by prayer to the gods. From this myth alone we should not presume to infer that human sacrifice was common among the Hindus some four or five centuries before the Christian era; but it proves that the idea of human sacrifices was not strange to them, and there are reasons to believe that it was a custom frequently followed. Among many of the ancient nations human sacrifices were occasionally offered, connected with the idea of propitiation and atonement, or, perhaps more frequently, with the obligations of a vow. In the Jewish Scriptures such sacrifices are twice mentioned, proving how common the terrible rite must have been among the Syrian nations, and how often performed, since we find the minds of men worshipping Jehovah, and living under his law, familiarized with the thought. Abraham's obedience was tested, and Jephtha learned the folly of vowing that which could not be per-

formed, without outraging the most sacred of human ties, and of putting our duty to God in danger by competition with our strongest affections.

The habit of burning widows, slaves, and domestic animals upon the funeral piles of chieftains and men of rank, was another custom connecting Druidism with eastern forms of religion. "The funerals of the Gauls," Cæsar says, "are sumptuous and splendid, in proportion to their civilization; everything in which a man was supposed to take pleasure whilst he was alive is placed with him on the funeral pile, even animals, and not long ago the slaves and dependents whom he most liked were burnt with him." This description of widow burning by Druidism, written at the commencement of the Christian era, is a concise description of the custom as it existed in India not many years since, and would be practised now if the forbidding authority of Britain, herself long since cured of the vice of human sacrifice, were withdrawn.

It is not strange, then, that Druidism should bear the marks of blood, if, as there is the most ample reason to believe, it was brought from the east. In almost every religious act of Oriental superstition, and in the European Polytheisms which grew out of it, there was shedding of blood. In the worship of some of the demon gods, the priests shed their own blood, and were ever dabbling in gore. The priests of Baal wounded themselves with knives, as also did the priests of Cybele. But surely there was never such a blood-smearing scene as that which conse-

crated the Pontifex Maximus. It is described in detail by Prudentius. Standing under a platform pierced with holes, clothed in silk and wearing a golden crown, he received on his person the blood of a slaughtered ox. He literally bathed in blood, for it was his care to be everywhere stained with the gore, "nor let a single drop descend in vain." I cannot understand the trembling awe of "the adoring throng," who saw the butcher-like high priest when he came steaming from the slaughter-house. No consecration to the service of cruelty and vice could have been more disgusting than this, and the people who willingly witnessed such an exhibition had an infinite need of some uplifting and redeeming influence.

Druidic rites were performed in groves, and the oak was sacred, as the symbol of the supreme God. In groves of oak the Druids taught their disciples, with oak-leaf garlands they bound their brows, and to the oak forests they retired for seclusion and study; but of all things the misletoe which grows upon the oak was to them the most sacred. "The Druids," Pliny says, "hold nothing more sacred than the misletoe, and the tree on which it is produced, provided it is the oak. They make choice of groves of oak on this account, nor do they perform any of their sacred rites without the leaves of that tree; so that one may suppose that they are for this reason called, by a Greek etymology, Druids. And whatever misletoe may grow on the oak they think it sent from Heaven, and it is a sign that God Himself

has chosen that tree. They call it by a name which signifies in their language the curer of all ills; and having duly prepared their feast and sacrifice under the tree, they bring to it two white bulls, whose horns are then for the first time tied. The priest, dressed in a white robe, ascends the tree, and with a golden pruning-hook cuts off the misletoe, which is received into a white sagum or sheet. Then they sacrifice the victims, praying that God would bless His own gift to those on whom He had bestowed it." This ceremony, we are elsewhere told, was always performed on the sixth day of the new moon.

In Holy Scriptures, and in such Oriental writings as have descended in fragments to our times, we find frequent reference to the planting of groves. The oak is mentioned as a place of meeting or resting, as if it were selected, it gave a special character, or sanctity to the place it overshadowed. When Abram left Haran for Canaan "he passed through the land and came unto the place of Sichem unto the lofty oak." When the angels appeared to him in Mamre he invited them "to rest under the tree." And when he met Abimelech at Beersheba he "planted a grove and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God." Jacob hid the strange gods "under the oak by Sehechim." Joshua raised a stone of memorial "under an oak, by the sanctuary of the Lord." And Ezekiel, when threatening his own nation because of their idolatries, speaks of places under the thick oak "where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols." The groves being

secret places, and probably unapproachable by the uninitiated, except at special times, became the scenes of great wickedness. They were common in Canaan as well as in Britain, and the Israelites were commanded to cut them down, pluck them up, and burn them with fire. And the general command was, "Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near the altar of the Lord thy God, which thou shalt make thee."

Among Oriental writers groves are frequently mentioned, and by both Greeks and Romans the oak was held to be sacred to Jupiter. It was perhaps in full confidence that the sacred groves would not be violated, that the Druids made their last resistance in the forests of Mona to the conquering power of Rome. But the confidence was vain. To close the contest the long resisted invaders burned the sacred woods and massacred the priests.

It is no part of my design to apologise for any of the gross rites of Druidism. Drunken revels there were, I fear, in the shades of the oak forests, such as cannot be mentioned without a painful consciousness of the immorality of those who permitted them, and of those who joined in them. But the Roman poets and historians were not blameless censors, for those vices they condemned in Britain as the consequences of national barbarism, they themselves allowed in some of the festivities of their gods. Pliny says that the British women stained themselves black with woad, and that in nudity they performed in some ceremonies. Dio-

nysius Perigetes, who lived in the time of Augustus, and wrote a geography in hexameters, says :—

"No other isles
To those of Britain justly can compare.
Islets adjacent lie, wherein the wives,
From the Amnites' distant shore, perform
Due rights to Bacchus, through the livelong night,
Deck'd in the dark leav'd ivy's clustering buds,
While the shrill echo of their chaunt resounds.

We will not withdraw the curtain which partially hides from public view the gross immoralities of the Roman games, and the festivals of some of the gods. Yet were we to do so, more debasing scenes would be observed than any recorded of the comparatively uncivilized inhabitants of Britain.

Among all the heathen nations who have shed blood in sacrifice, divination has been the pretension of the priests, or of a class of men specially engaged in forecasting events. Strabo says that among the Gauls there were three classes of privileged sacred persons, the Bards, the Vates, and the Druids. The Vates were the sacrificers and augers. "The Britons," says Diodorus Siculus, who lived in the time of Cæsar and Augustus, "have a great veneration for those who discover future events, either from the flight of birds, or from inspecting the entrails of certain victims, and all the people have faith in their interpretations." Astrology, too, we do not doubt, was a study to which the Druids were devoted. The observation of the stars was necessary in the very formation of society, for by their motions time was

measured, journeys directed over strange countries, and voyages over beaconless seas. Astronomy, even in its elements as a science, fed, while it partially satisfied an intelligent curiosity. But above all, the study was used to foretell the future. I do not mean employed as now to know the necessary succession of physical phenomena, but to declare coming events in individual life and national existence. The eastern magi were adepts in this occult science, and it is scarcely possible to believe that the Druids brought so much of Oriental philosophy into Europe, and were ignorant of the practice of astrology. There is some evidence of their possessing this kind of knowledge. An important and a very singular remark is made on this subject by Cæsar. The Gauls "measure time by nights, and not by days, and their birthdays together with the commencements of their months and years are so arranged, that the days are reckoned as parts of the preceding nights." This simply means that the people employed the astronomical division of time. How much this involves, the astronomer will understand.

Pliny tells a marvellous tale, not the only one to be found in his pages, about the serpents' egg, of which commentators have given no explanation. "Innumerable serpents," he says, "get together in the summer and form it artificially by the saliva from the jaws and the foam from their bodies. The Druids say that it is projected with hisses into the air, and ought to be caught in a cloth without being suffered

to touch the ground." The possession of this unique egg "is said to give success in law suits." This myth is, I believe, a specimen of the manner in which great truths, and dogmas received as such, were taught by the Druids to their pupils. The serpents' egg has possibly a reference to the path of the moon, the nodes being still called the Dragon's Head and the Dragon's Tail.

I have said enough, though my remarks have been necessarily brief, to explain some of the principal truths and dogmas of Druidism, and the duties performed by the Druids in the communication of them to the brave and hardy people over whom they ruled. They enforced the laws, and encouraged obedience by a promise of reward—they conducted the rites of their religion, and they decided all questions of dispute, judging the past and predicting the future. As teachers they communicated orally the truths or dogmas they had in the same manner received, for writing was forbidden to all who had been instructed in the mysteries. The sacred groves, where the sturdy oaks stood generation after generation almost unchanged by time, were the schools and colleges of Druidism; and there the young men were taught by the initiated in triadic verses, some of which may possibly be still extant in the well-known Triads.

Many subjects of great interest I am necessarily leaving unnoticed for want of time. Illustrations of the material works of the Druids and their people are abundant, but I cannot even mention them. I must also leave unnoticed the evidences of the origin

of the people and of their relations to other nations, as marked by peculiarities of language. But I cannot close this paper without one or two remarks upon the arguments employed in support of that scepticism which denies all that antiquaries think they know about Druids and Druidism.

I have already stated that Druids and Druidism were but little, if at all, known beyond the bounds of the countries they occupied, till Cæsar wrote his Commentaries. This fact has been used as an argument against the accuracy of the statements made by the Emperor, and therefore against the reported character of the religion and its priests. No one can deny that Cæsar was a clear and intelligible writer, a well-intentioned and truthful historian, holding a prominent position among the authors called classic. But Cæsar is attacked because he occupies the path to the strongholds of Druidism. His descriptions are said to be brief and unsatisfactory, and, so far as relates to the Druids, his history is said to be carelessly written, because he could take no interest in the social life of barbarians, the opinions and feelings of such people "not being worth caring about." Having thus disposed of Cæsar and his statements, though he is essentially the historian of the barbarians of his age, it was easy to dismiss with cold contempt all that had been done by the modern antiquary to fill up the outlines of the sketches left by ancient authors, and connect one with the other. But as all sciences are made up of deductions from a few well

known facts, and truth is demonstrated by the mutual relations of facts and conclusions, the formation of an unbroken compact theory is a proof of the accuracy of the individual facts, just as the enduring symmetry of an architectural structure proves the fitness and adaptation of the various parts.

When the critic has disposed of Cæsar he may easily erase a few lines from the pages of Tacitus. And this has been done. The cautious and terse historian may, we are told, have written his bold and picturesque description of the invasion of Mona "for effect rather than truth." If so, let us admit at once that all history is mythical, and the more vivid the description the more likely it is to be a poetical fable!

That case must, indeed, be utterly false which a special pleader could not support by a plausible hypothesis. But the Anti-Druidites, as they call themselves, have not the skill which is necessary to put a good face on a bad cause. The falsity of the arguments adopted by them is detected by the most casual reader. Having disposed of the authority of Cæsar and Tacitus, and certainly all the authors of inferior mark, a modern sceptic says—"Had the Druids and Bards really existed in those periods in which they have been described, had they really exercised the powers imparted to them, over the religion, the literature and the arts of a great people, or of immense tribes, it is scarcely possible to conceive that all possible evidence of their authority would have disappeared." The writer is like a man

who burns a will and defies the legatees to prove that they have rights, or like a man who removes his neighbour's landmarks. Dealing thus with history, we can scarcely feel surprised by the same writer's attack on the personal veracity of the late Godfrey Higgins, who is charged with purposely quoting from Toland a passage written by Lucian instead of from the Greek author, the reason being a desire to give a perverted reading.

That so little should be known of the inhabitants of Britain before the commencement of the Christian era is much to be regretted. But the statements of Herodotus and others appear to be in every way worthy of credit. The deductions drawn from the few facts they communicate are reasonable; and although presented as probabilities, they stand upon the same basis as does the great mass of historical evidence.

I must leave you, however, to decide what degree of credit should be given to the evidence adduced. You will deal frankly and kindly with what appears doubtful, and cordially sanction all that tends to prove the necessity of Christian teaching to civilize and elevate mankind. Happy are we in whose time the old prophetic declaration has been fulfilled—"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light."

Bennett, Printer, Journal Office, Salisbury.